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## **Whole Foods to Pay \$1.6 Million for Hazardous Waste Breach**

*Stores in San Diego and throughout the state improperly handled and disposed of hazardous waste*

Whole Foods customers can now have confidence that they are not contributing to the unlawful disposal of hazardous waste in California landfills.

San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that, as the result of a lawsuit filed by San Diego and 21 other prosecuting agencies, Whole Foods and two affiliates are required to label and store hazardous materials to protect employees and customers from exposure, to properly track and document hazardous waste, and to dispose of it only at authorized facilities.

Additionally, the companies will pay more than \$1.4 million in civil penalties and legal costs, as well as more than \$200,000 toward supplemental environmental projects and the prosecution of similar crimes. San Diego will receive approximately \$113,000 in civil penalties, including more than \$16,000 to support the work of the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health.

The judgment by Yolo County Judge Thomas E. Warriner covers Whole Foods Market California Inc., Mrs. Gooch's Natural Food Markets Inc., and WFM-WO Inc. The court found that the companies mishandled and illegally disposed of hazardous waste at their California store locations. Whole Foods stores in Hillcrest and UTC were implicated in the complaint.

Over a five-year period, Whole Foods disposed of hazardous materials, such as ignitable liquids, aerosol products, cleaning agents, and other flammable, reactive, toxic, and corrosive materials, at each of its facilities. Failure to properly handle and dispose of these items violated the California Health and Safety Code. This code, which includes the Hazardous Waste Control Law, provides a comprehensive framework regulating the generation, handling, treatment, storage, transportation, and disposal of hazardous waste. This law was established to protect public health and the environment.

**“California has some of the most stringent environmental protection laws in the nation, and for good reason,”** said City Attorney Mara W. Elliott. **“Companies that handle hazardous waste owe it to their customers, employees, and communities to dispose of this material safely and lawfully. My office works to ensure that all corporations, regardless of size or status, are accountable for their conduct.”**

The People of the State of California were represented by Deputy City Attorney Michael Hudson of the San Diego City Attorney's Affirmative Civil Enforcement (ACE) Unit and 21 other prosecuting agencies throughout the state.

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The San Diego City Attorney's ACE Unit pursues public interest causes of action on behalf of the People of the State of California under the Unfair Competition Law, including consumer privacy, predatory lending, as well as unsafe and dangerous products. The Unit also handles complex litigation matters and serious environmental violations, and prosecutes wage theft cases under state law and City ordinance.

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